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Comm. 15

Approved For Release 2004/05/05 : CIA-RDP80M01082A000200020010-1

1 October 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: The 30 September Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Revitalizing the Watch Mechanism

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1. [] indicated in his opening remarks that he was aware of two basic remedies for fixing the Watch mechanism--one to narrow its charter, the other to extend it. He favors the first option, but is willing to have the second also presented to USIB if there is support for it and the differences can be stated "clearly." He hoped that the problem could be decided in a few days.
 2. Mr. Lehman discussed the Alerting Memorandum (AM) and the Watch Committee proposals together. The subject of an AM could be any potential crisis affecting US interests, i.e., of sufficient importance to require action by U.S. policymakers. Normally WSAG would be the appropriate audience for an AM, but the subject could be an economic problem, in which case WSAG would not be the primary recipient. The general rule of thumb for issuing an AM is that the lower the importance of the subject, the higher the probability should be that the event will in fact occur. For example, there should be at least a 50% probability in the case of a coup in Cyprus, but perhaps only 10% probability in the case of a Soviet military attack on the US or in Europe.
 3. Mr. Lehman then spoke of a "special" kind of warning (large case Warning)--that is, covering any conceivable use of Soviet military forces, and possibly Chinese military forces, and, at the extreme limit, North Korean military forces. It is highly desirable, for bureaucratic reasons alone, to have a special mechanism--the Watch Committee--to handle this special type of warning. But in effect this revitalized, and smaller, Watch Committee/Staff would act like a NIO, and see that an AM in its area was produced. It would not consider wider problems such as a coup in Portugal; rather the NIOs for the appropriate areas would prepare the appropriate AMs.
 4. The DIA representatives argued that warning products (AMs) must get to a wider readership than the national-level policymakers. Warning must get to the commander of the 82nd Airborne, for instance. Moreover, there are a lot of potential problems on which some type of "warning" must be issued to someone but which might not deserve an AM. On important warning papers one should allow for a "devil's advocate" view.

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5. The Air Force representatives opined that the problem of the Watch Committee mechanism was lack of use. But there was considerable need for warning capabilities. Indeed DIA had not been able to perform a Watch function on behalf of the services, who therefore had to jerry-build their own capabilities. And any warning mechanism must have the experts who can distinguish the signal from the noise.

6. The State representatives agreed with their Air Force counterpart that warning is a special art, requiring a special mechanism. They expressed concern that if the NIOs alone were in charge of AMs problems covering more than one NIO would fall between cracks, or assume a Soviet dimension too suddenly for non-Soviet specialists to realize it. For these and other reasons State leans toward a broad concept of the Watch mechanism.

7. The NSA representatives repeatedly made the point that he had not yet heard the case for the broad concept. When he did, he would try his hand at a "middle of the road" approach.

8. The Chairman's closing remarks stressed that unless the focus of strategic warning were narrowed, then the rest of the Community would feel no obligation to warn. He promised a clean draft of the narrow concept paper by the end of the week, but said he would also consider a case for the broad concept. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for 10 ~~August~~ October at 10 a.m. The committee on the AM may be combined with this one (but, as Mr. Lehman commented, the DCI believes the AM already exists) so that is an argument for keeping the two committees separate.

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